

BUILDING AN ARMY FROM SCRATCH:

SLOVAKIA'S UPHILL STRUGGLE

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HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS : ARMY, NATION, STATE

The silken split-up, on 1 January 1993, of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (as the Czechoslovak Republic was renamed under Slovak pressure in April 1990) was a parting that led, with respect to democratic development - initially at least - to more sorrow than to sweetness in both of the successor states, especially, however, in Slovakia. Since 1968, as one of the "two equal fraternal nations" - in theory, at least - within the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the Slovaks had nonetheless long fallen victim to Prague-inspired manic centralization - the federal government was empowered to override decisions taken by the national governments - not only under unitary Communist Party rule, but, in fact, ever since 1918, when the first Czechoslovak Republic was declared in Prague. Prior to 1918, and for a period of one thousand years following the defeat of the Great Moravian Empire by the Magyars in 906, Slovakia and the Slovaks (unlike the Czech Slavs to the west of the river Morava, which currently forms part of the border with Austria and the Czech Republic) were an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary. This millennium of Slovak serfdom under the Magyar yoke, together with the brutal repression of Slovak culture and language, has made a major contribution to the strong sense of ethnic differentiation between Slovaks and Czechs, and continues to foment the present-day tensions between Slovaks and Hungarians.

The nineteenth-century národné obrodienie, or Slovak national revival movement, under the leadership of Ľudovít Štúr, sought to rediscover the repressed, and therefore submerged, if not lost, identity of a distinctive Slovak ethnie. The son of a Protestant pastor, Štúr, a pan-Slavist educator-intellectual and author of the "Demands of the Slovak Nation" who led the unsuccessful 1848 revolt against the Hungarians, also offered vigorous cultural resistance to the more dominant Czech culture and succeeded in establishing a separate Slovak language, based on his own Central Slovak dialect, which became the official Slovak written language, as distinct from Czech. Later, in 1861, in the Central Slovak mountain town of Turčianský Svätý Martin, Slovak intellectuals proclaimed a Memorandum of the Slovak Nation which emphasized the need for the Slovak national revival to find concrete political expression, declared that the Slovaks "were as much a nation as the Magyars," and sought the establishment of a North Hungarian Slovak District (which would, however,

remain an integral part of Hungary) with Slovak as the official language. Yet again such demands were not merely wholly unsuccessful, but measurably sharpened the Magyar and Austrian authorities' appetite for ever greater cultural repression: the Magyarization policy that followed the 1867 Ausgleich made Hungarian the sole language of instruction in schools, closed down all Slovak institutions of higher education, ensured that Slovaks remained members of the peasant, rather than the landowning class, and all but drove underground the embryonic political forces of the Slovak national revival. However, the establishment in Martin (in 1863) of the Matica slovenská, an institution that was formed to nurture and promote the nascent national Slovak culture through education, the study of history, literature and the arts, transformed an unknown Turiec valley settlement into what became, and indeed remains, a spiritual centre for the Slovak nation, a focal point for Slovak nationalism. (In 1918, Slovak nationalists signed the Martin Declaration, preferring to throw in their lot with the Czechs, rather than remaining victims of a relentless and suffocating policy of Magyarization; and as recently as late August 1997, the opposition democratic coalition proclaimed A People's Covenant in Martin, pledging a renewal of the rule of law and of parliamentary democracy, if and when they were returned to power.)

In March 1939, the first ever independent Slovak state (Slovak Republic, March 1939-March 1945, under the leadership of Jozef Tiso) was proclaimed in a time of peace; its destiny, however, was to become inextricably linked to the fortunes of the world war that erupted less than six months later. For, in reality, the Slovak Republic was little more than a Nazi puppet construction, propped up by the proto-Fascist Hlinka Guards, the Slovak equivalent of the German SS, named after the indefatigable campaigner for Slovak independence and national martyr, Andrej Hlinka (1864-1938). A catholic priest, Hlinka had been the leader of the largest interwar party in Slovakia, whose slogan "Slovakia for the Slovaks" clearly proclaimed its vehement nationalism. While many Slovaks evidently held the Tiso regime to be a genuine expression of Slovak statehood, thousands - including army deserters, democrats, communists and Jews (two-thirds of Slovakia's 90,000 strong Jewish population were deported and most perished) - took to the hills and engaged in partisan activity against the newly independent state. The Slovak National Uprising (Slovenské národné povstanie, SNP) that broke out in Banská Bystrica on 29 August 1944 was a contribution to the war against Germany, but also spelled the end of Slovak statehood. Indeed, the allies' diplomatic recognition, in 1941, of the London Czechoslovak government-in-exile had already given notice of their agreement for the restoration of Czechoslovakia at the end of the war, and the concomitant disappearance of the Slovak Republic.

Since November 1989, Slovakia's brief period of independence, the political figures associated with it, and (especially) the Slovak National Uprising - topics which focus on the notions army, nation, state - have been the subject of much

public and private controversy and debate. (In the black-and-white world of communist historiography the SNP was unequivocally portrayed as a glorious, Soviet-inspired operation in the struggle to overcome Fascism.) Thus Slovak nationalists have mounted a campaign to rehabilitate Hlinka and Tiso. Streets and squares have been renamed after Hlinka, commemorative ceremonies are held in Ľubica, his birthplace, and leading politicians recall his contribution to the renewal of Slovakia's national and political life. However, when a commemorative plaque to Tiso was unveiled in his home town of Bánovce nad Bebravou it caused consternation and outrage and was eventually removed. Námestie SNP (Uprising Square) remains a focal point in many a Slovak town. And for many Slovaks the SNP remains a precedent - albeit a bloody and unsuccessful one - of civic resistance. In a commemorative address on 29 August 1997 President Kováčik spoke of the SNP's "democratic message" and warned against Slovakia's international isolation. By way of contrast, Defence Minister Ján Šittek, a member of the government coalition Slovak National Party (SNS), which more or less openly advocates the war-time Slovak state, joined other SNS leaders in September to welcome in Bratislava French National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Present-day Slovakia is a deeply divided country as the rift, combined with considerable personal antagonism, between President and Prime Minister might suggest. Political debate continues to be sharply polarized, and notions of nationhood and statehood remain brittle and fragile. This is perhaps hardly surprising after one thousand years of Magyar cultural repression, seventy years of centralized rule by decree from Prague, the rather dubious legacy of the wartime Slovak Republic, the equivocal nature of the SNP, forty years of real existing socialism and Soviet military dominance including the events of 1968, the great hyphen debate of 1990, and the trauma associated with the 1993 establishment of the Slovak state - for such, in brief, is the historical context within which Slovakia has had to build her army, to some considerable extent, from scratch.

MILITARY-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NEW SLOVAK ARMY

The Slovak National Council declared the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic as the foundation for the sovereign state of the Slovak nation on 17 July 1992. By 1 September 1992 the National Council had approved the Slovak Constitution and, on 16 December 1992, approved the creation of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic and a new Defence Ministry. On 1 January 1993 two new independent states, the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, appeared on the map of Europe. All Slovaks and all Czechs who had served in the Czechoslovak Army were obliged to swear allegiance to the Slovak Republic by 31 January 1993, if they wished to serve in the new Slovak Army. Czechoslovak military assets (arms and equipment) were divided among Czechs

and Slovaks in the ratio of 2:1, while real estate (training grounds, barracks) were retained by the state in which they were located. This has led to problems. An academy for training ground forces did not exist on Slovak territory, for example, and so a completely new faculty for ground forces had to be established as one of the four faculties at the SNP Military Academy in Liptovský Mikuláš. (Conversely, the only Air Force Academy in former Czechoslovakia was in Košice, Slovakia). Before the split the (then) Slovak Military District was essentially a rear training area, and in present-day Slovakia there are many training facilities which are seriously underused.

Troops were redeployed and accommodation was built to house them. The new defence ministry was established in the capital, Bratislava, and the Army Command (later to become the General Staff) in Trenčín. President Kováčik, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, appointed General Andrej Škvařina, former Czech and Slovak Federal Republic Defence Minister, as Slovakia's first Minister of Defence on 16 March 1993. There were difficulties with finding competent and qualified Ministry of Defence civilian staff, since prior to partition the majority of administrators and civil servants had been located in Prague.

On 1 March 1994 the Mečiar government approved the Defence Doctrine of the Slovak Republic. "The Slovak Republic does not consider any state to be its enemy and does not feel threatened by any state," proclaims Article 1 of the Slovak Defence Doctrine, which is divided into five sections. Slovakia makes no territorial claims on any other country, respects their sovereignty and political independence, and seeks to contribute to regional security in Europe. Political trust and military transparency are essential for long-term and extensive cooperation with Slovakia's neighbours and all other countries.

Section two outlines the basic sovereign interests of Slovakia and declares the orientation of defence policy to be towards transatlantic and western political, economic and security structures, while emphasizing the active participation of Slovakia in the Partnership for Peace.

The third section is concerned with the basic principles of Slovak defence policy and emphasizes the sovereignty of the Slovak state, the meticulous observation of the principles and rules of international law, the need to construct and maintain armed forces in accordance with defence needs, and the need to relate defence requirements to the economic, political, scientific and technical potential of the state.

Section four covers armed forces in general and the Slovak Army in particular. The task of the Slovak Army is to avert threats to the sovereignty of the state by the timely adoption of necessary defensive measures; to fend off the aggressor in the event of attack; to destroy forces which have broken through state

territory with a view to restoring territorial integrity; in close cooperation with civil defence and territorial bodies to protect the population; to assist in emergency situations and in the recovery from natural disasters.

The fifth section clarifies the conditions for implementing defence policy. In particular, it emphasizes the principle of civilian, democratic supervision and direction of the armed forces.

Me_iar's first government fell in March 1994. The new Morav_ik government (March-December 1994) quickly took a number of important steps along the path of military and defence reform. Pavol Kanis, a civilian, was appointed Minister of Defence. The Defence Doctrine was revised so as to place far greater emphasis on Slovakia's developing closer relations with European and transatlantic security structures; the doctrine made it plain that Slovakia's strategic goal was to obtain full membership of NATO. Slovakia signed its Partnership for Peace (PfP) Presentation Document on 25 May 1994 and has steadily increased the amount it has spent on PfP activities from one to 4.5% of the defence budget. The Army High Command was transformed into a General Staff along Western European lines. Both the Defence Ministry and the (new) General Staff were significantly reduced in size in order to prevent duplication of effort and inefficiency. In September 1994 Colonel General Jozef Tuchy_a was appointed as the new Chief of the Slovak Army General Staff. In November he signed the order to establish Army Corps (1st Army Corps, 2nd Army Corps, 3rd Air Force and Air Defence Corps) to replace the existing divisions, while the restructuring of regiments into brigades was completed by October 1995.

MINISTERS OF DEFENCE SLOVAK REPUBLIC	
March 1993 :	General Imrich Andrej_ak
March 1994:	Pavol Kanis
December 1994:	Ján Sitek

In December 1994 Me_iar returned as prime minister in a government coalition that included - in addition to his own highly populist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) - the extreme right-wing and radically nationalistic Slovak National Party (SNS) and the extreme left-wing and anti-reform Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS). Together the coalition parties held 83 seats in the 150-strong National Council; three years on, with 81 seats, the

government continues to enjoy an absolute majority. In view of Me_iar's confrontational style, and given the authoritarian, paternalistic and nationalistic nature of the coalition parties, some observers have characterized the government's exercise of power as a "tyranny of the majority." Ján Sitek (SNS), a civilian, was appointed Minister of Defence - a post he still holds today. The conflict between prime minister Me_iar and president Ková_ escalated alarmingly during 1995. Me_iar's government slashed the presidential budget by 50%, passed a no-confidence vote against president Ková_ and demanded that he resign on the grounds that he was "betraying our nation." For his part, Ková_, in April, accused Me_iar of building an illegal parallel structure of intelligence activity that was working against the president - a claim that was to acquire considerable resonance following the mysterious and violent abduction of President Ková_'s son in August 1995. The ever-deepening rift between prime minister and president eventually meant that the army and the defence ministry became unable to remain entirely out of politics: in October, Secretary of State for Defence, Jozef Gajdos, publicly questioned the authority of President Ková_ as commander-in-chief of the Slovak Armed Forces.

The institutionalized "bullying" of new conscripts by older soldiers remains a problem in most post-communist armies, and Slovakia is no exception. The Human Resources Development and Support Division and the Military Chaplaincy Office, both established at the Defence Ministry in 1995, are working to "humanize" military service and so eradicate this problem. The first Slovak Army field mass took place during the PFP exercise "Determination '95" held in September at Lešt. The chaplaincy service has been working with the troops ever since. There is to be one chaplain for every 1000 soldiers.

Thousands of young Slovaks were refusing to fulfil their 12 months conscript service obligation - a manning problem that is again typical of post-communist armies and one that is not unrelated to revelations about "bullying" and the depravity of barrack-block life. Moreover, there are serious communication problems with Magyar conscripts who speak only Hungarian. In September 1995 the National Council passed a law on alternative service, according to which civilians would serve without weapons or uniforms for 2 years (ie twice as long as conscript servicemen), for pro-rata pay.

However, despite the problems with bullying and manning, it must not be thought that the army is unpopular among the people, or generally held in low esteem. Quite the contrary! Public opinion polls have repeatedly shown the army in a very good light and suggest that it is one of the most trusted public institutions in society.

SLOVAK CITIZENS' CONFIDENCE IN STATE INSTITUTIONS

(A public opinion poll conducted by the Slovak Statistical Bureau in June 1994)

	Confidence in %	No Confidence in %	Don't Know in %
ARMY	74	17	9
PRESIDENT	63	31	6
CHURCH	52	43	5
CABINET	52	40	8
POLICE	51	46	3
COURTS	47	44	9
NATIONAL COUNCIL	44	47	9
TRADE UNIONS	43	40	17

Again, in May 1996, 70.2% of the respondents in a Slovak Radio poll trust the army (in first place of twelve institutions), as compared with 44.8% for the Prime Minister (in ninth place), and 42.9% for the government (twelfth). The high regard in which the Slovaks hold their Army contrasts sharply with the low esteem in which Czech society holds its military. As President Havel has said of the Czech Army: "What should change faster is the attitude of the public to the Army and the attitude of the soldiers to themselves. It is necessary that service in the Army become an honour, that citizens view soldiers as people who protect our freedoms rather than as parasites. That will require a lot more work."

The Slovak Army has rather different problems and some of them are to do with money: defence spending has fallen every year over the last five years, compared to the gross national product. In 1993 Slovakia spent 2.5% of GNP on defence; by 1996 it had fallen to 2.2%, and in 1998 it is expected to be only 1.9% of GNP. Chief of the Slovak Army General Staff, Lt-Gen Tuchy_a, lamented yet again in September 1997 that the Slovak Army was the most poorly paid in Central Europe. Since the army was established, about one-third of the career soldiers - mostly high achievers - had left for the private sector, usually for better pay and conditions. It would be far

far cheaper, according to the General, for the state to create acceptable pay and conditions for career servicemen rather than having to train them again and again at great cost.

Whereas in 1993 Air Force pilots flew a total of 16,000 hours, in 1996 they flew only 12,000 hours, and in 1997 a mere 6,000 hours. That is to say, pilots flew 50-60 hours (some as little as 30 hours) annually, which contrasts with the 120 hours considered to be an optimal amount per annum. There was no live firing by either the Air Force or the Air Defence Troops in 1997, and only half of the Ground Forces' battalions took part in field training exercises. Command post exercises were limited to such an extent that commanders were in danger of losing the skills that are required to direct troops in combat.

Slovak Army

Overall holdings	
Men:	45483
Tanks:	478 (206 T-55; 272 T-72)
Armoured Combat Vehicles:	683 (383 BMP-1; 93 BMP-2; 207 OT-90)
Artillery:	382 (49 2S1 SP How; 76 D-30 How; 134 Dana SP Gun-How M77; 87 RM-70; 32 Mortar Model 1982; 4 SP Mortar Model 1982)
Combat Aircraft:	113 (57 MiG-21; 24 MiG-29; 20 Su-22; 12 Su-25)
Attack Helicopters:	19 Mi-24

Modernization of weapons systems and equipment has thus far been virtually non-existent, except for the acquisition of MiG-29s in settlement of Russian debt. (In 1998 Moscow will supply the Slovak Army with 140 million dollars worth of military equipment, including S-300 anti-missile air-defence systems, as a further instalment of its debt repayment.) In October 1997 Defence Minister Sitek announced the procurement of eight NATO-compatible 155mm Zuzana gun howitzers from the ZTS arms factory in Dubnica - the biggest purchase of new weapons from the domestic market since the establishment of the Slovak Army in 1993. Moreover, the modernization of Slovak T-72 tanks was also planned. However, senior military officers have repeatedly sharply criticized the proposed defence cuts, and at the end of 1997 it yet remains to be

seen just when the army will obtain its new howitzers, and when the modernized Slovak T-72 will be subjected to testing.

Throughout 1996 and 1997 Me_iar's government, in rhetoric at least, has remained committed to NATO and EU integration. However, Slovakia's ruling coalition has continued to implement a populist and nationalist political agenda that has frequently violated democratic principles. Me_iar's highly controversial domestic policies have been regarded in the West as a major obstacle to Western integration. Small wonder! His continuing vicious campaign to unseat the president - the last main bulwark between the prime minister and untrammelled power - has bitterly divided Slovaks. President Ková_, for his part, has accused Prime Minister Me_iar's government of "violence, physical liquidation, setting off bombs, making threats, spreading fear, causing the moral decay of our public life, corrupting and criminalizing all sorts of state organs as well as political life, misusing police and prosecutors, controlling the state media and manipulating public opinion."

Time and again the West has expressed its concern about Slovakia's political system. When Secretary General Solana visited Bratislava in April 1996 he felt constrained to emphasize that NATO is a democratic organization that "associates with countries that respect democratic values, human rights, and differences between ethnic minorities." The United States expressed serious concern about the conduct of the Slovak government with regard to the May 1997 referendum on NATO membership and direct election of the president: not only was the referendum a step back from the free and democratic elections held after 1989, the Slovak cabinet had also demonstrated its disrespect for the rule of law. (Me_iar had effectively placed executive power above the law by ordering the printing of ballot papers without the question on direct election of the president. This resulted in legal chaos and a highly confused electorate. Many people were deterred from casting their votes and the referendum was thus frustrated, foiled and thwarted - a sorry business indeed!) Following the referendum EU Commissioner Hans van den Broek conveyed the concern of all 15 EU countries at the fact that the principles of democracy and the legal state did not seem to be anchored in Slovakia. In June the EU noted the absence of proportional representation of the opposition in parliamentary bodies and lack of control over the security service as further instances of shortcomings in democratic procedures.

On the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (1 September 1997) President Ková_ urged all Slovaks jointly to exert the maximum possible effort "so that our country is not turned into a country which, despite having a democratic constitution, lacks a democratic constitutionality."

The situation of ethnic minorities - especially Hungarians and Roma - in Slovakia has arguably worsened during 1997. In September Roma complained of "official state racism", while laws that discriminate against the use of minority languages (notably Hungarian) have not been amended. Hundreds of teachers have been fined, and a number of headmasters have been sacked, because they issued school reports in both Slovak and Hungarian, or made out a special report in the Hungarian language.

At the end of 1997, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic have all been invited to join NATO and will start negotiations on EU membership early in 1998. By way of contrast Slovakia is still queueing up to join both clubs. Unlike the other three Central European states, Slovakia has experienced special problems in respect of military transformation in that, to some extent, she has had to build her army from scratch. The Army (as in Poland, but in contrast to Hungary and the Czech Republic) enjoys great respect in Slovak society, and Slovakia has been an enthusiastic, competent and generous participant in PfP. The Slovak Army has also contributed very positively to United Nations' supervisory missions in Angola, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, and established a major (UNPROFOR) peace-keeping training programme at Lest. However, like most post-communist armed forces, there are problems with manning (officers and conscripts), "bullying," housing, and social support.

Budgetary constraints are severe and modernization of weapons systems and equipment has not taken place. There is an important sense, however, in which the detail of military development outlined above is clearly subordinate to broader issues associated with post-communist transitions. The notion of defence in a democracy presupposes a democracy to defend. In that respect Slovakia clearly has still some way to go.